

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-14, 17-25, and 29 have been cancelled without prejudice. Please amend the claims as follows:

1-14. (Cancelled)

15. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:

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a body connectable to ~~said~~the top drive;
~~at least one~~a plurality of rigid gripping elements radially displaceable by hydraulic or pneumatic fluid directly applied ~~thereto~~to an inner surface of each gripping element to drivingly engage a tubular to permit a screw connection between ~~said~~the tubular and a further tubular to be tightened to a required torque, the plurality of gripping elements disposed within the body in substantially the same axial plane with one another; and
a sealing packer to inhibit, in use, fluid in ~~said~~the tubular from escaping therefrom.

16. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 15, wherein said sealing packer is actuated by hydraulic or pneumatic fluid.

17-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars, comprising:

a top drive;
a body connectable to the top drive; and
~~at least one~~a plurality of recesses disposed ~~about~~within an outer surface of the body, wherein each recess ~~comprises~~houses a rigid gripping element,
wherein ~~the~~each gripping element is radially displaceable outward from each recess by hydraulic or pneumatic fluid directly applied ~~thereto~~to an inner surface thereof to engage a first tubular.

27. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the gripping element transfers rotational torque from the top drive to permit a screw connection between the first tubular and a second tubular.

28 (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 27, wherein the screw connection is tightened to a prescribed moment.

29. (Cancelled)

30. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 31, wherein the first section comprises a splined recess into which a splined connecting member may be located.

31. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars, comprising;
a top drive;
a body having a first and second section;
one or more a plurality of recesses disposed about within an outer diameter of the
second section and disposed in substantially the same axial plane with one another;
and
a ~~radially expandable~~rigid gripping element disposed within each recess, wherein
~~the each~~ gripping elements ~~are~~ is radially ~~expandable~~extendable with pressurized
hydraulic or pneumatic fluid directly applied ~~thereto~~ to its inner surface.

32. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 31, wherein the gripping elements are radially ~~expanded~~extendable to engage an inner surface of a tubular.

33. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 32, further comprising one or more compensating pistons, wherein the pistons are pneumatically operable and adjustable to compensate for different weights of the tubular.

34. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 32, wherein the body is connected to the top drive.

35. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 34, wherein the top drive provides rotational torque to permit a screw connection between one or more tubulars.

36. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:

a body connectable to ~~said~~the top drive;
~~at least one~~a plurality of rigid gripping elements disposed in substantially the same axial plane and radially displaceable from a plurality of recesses within the body by pressurized fluid directly applied ~~thereto~~to an inner surface thereof, the plurality of gripping elements gripping a tubular torsionally to tighten a screw thread on the tubular and gripping the tubular axially to carry the weight of the tubular; and
a sealing packer to prohibit pressurized fluid in ~~said~~the tubular from escaping therefrom.

37. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, further comprising one or more compensating pistons, wherein the pistons are pneumatically operable and adjustable to compensate for different weights of the tubular.

38. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:

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a body connectable to said top drive;
~~at least one~~a plurality of rigid gripping elements ~~carried on~~disposed within a plurality of recesses within an outer surface of the body ~~and being radially displaceable to grip a tubular in~~ substantially the same axial plane with one another;
a fluid communication path for delivering fluid pressure directly to the inner surfaces of the plurality of gripping elements, ~~said~~the fluid pressure radially displacing the plurality of gripping elements to grip an inner surface of a tubular; and
a sealing packer to prohibit pressurized fluid in ~~said~~the tubular from escaping therefrom.

39. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 38, further comprising one or more compensating pistons, wherein the pistons are pneumatically operable and adjustable to compensate for different weights of the tubular.

Please add the following new claims:

40. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the plurality of gripping elements are circumferentially spaced from one another in substantially the same axial plane.

41. (New) The apparatus of claim 26, further comprising a sealing packer disposed within the outer surface of the body to inhibit fluid in the first tubular from escaping therefrom.

42. (New) The apparatus of claim 38, wherein the fluid communication path for delivering fluid pressure to the plurality of gripping elements is further capable of delivering fluid pressure directly to the sealing packer to radially displace the sealing packer into contact with the inner surface of the tubular.

43. (New) The apparatus of claim 38, wherein the sealing packer is disposed within a second recess within the outer surface of the body and radially extendable from the recess to contact the inner surface of the tubular.

44. (New) The apparatus of claim 43, wherein the fluid pressure is further deliverable directly from the fluid communication path to the sealing packer.

45. (New) A method for manipulating tubulars, comprising:
providing a gripping apparatus comprising:
a body having a plurality of recesses circumferentially spaced therein, the recesses in substantially the same axial plane, and
a plurality of rigid gripping elements disposed within the plurality of recesses;
radially extending the plurality of gripping elements to grippingly engage an inner surface of a tubular by introducing pressurized fluid directly behind the plurality of gripping elements;
rotating the tubular with a top drive connected to the body; and

lowering the tubular into a wellbore.

46. (New) The method of claim 45, further comprising introducing fluid through the tubular while lowering the tubular.

47. (New) The method of claim 46, wherein the tubular is sealingly engaged by a sealing packer disposed on the body.

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48. (New) The method of claim 47, wherein the sealing packer provides a sealed fluid path through the apparatus and the tubular.
